



PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

Council Meeting Date: March 24, 2009
Staff Report #: 09-039

Agenda Item #: D2

CONSENT: Approval of Encinal Safe Routes to School Plan and Adoption of a Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Submit a Joint Application with the Town of Atherton for a California Safe Routes to School (SR2S) Grant for the Improvement of Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety for Safe Routes to Encinal School.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Approve the Encinal Safe Routes to School Plan per Attachment B.
2. Adopt a resolution authorizing the City Manager to submit a joint application with the Town of Atherton for a California Safe Routes to School (SR2S) grant for the improvement of pedestrian and bicycle safety for the Safe Routes to Encinal School, as illustrated in Attachment C, Conceptual Plan (Vicinity of School).

BACKGROUND

California Safe Routes to School (SR2S) Program

Established in 1999 and administered by the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the SR2S program came into effect from the passage and signing of Assembly Bill 1475. Several bills have been enacted to extend the program, the most recent bill is AB 57, which extends the program indefinitely.

Section 2333.5 of the Streets and Highways Code calls for Caltrans, in consultation with the California Highway Patrol, to make the SR2S grants available to local government agencies through a statewide competition.

The goals of the SR2S program are to reduce injuries and fatalities to school children and to encourage increased walking and bicycling among students. The program achieves these goals by constructing facilities that enhance safety for pedestrians and bicyclists on pathways, trails, sidewalks, and street crossings.

Seven cycles of project solicitation for the SR2S program have been completed. The application submittal deadline for the eighth cycle of the SR2S program is on April 15, 2009. This call for projects covers Fiscal Years 2008-09 and 2009-10, for which the amounts available are approximately \$48.5 million statewide.

Proposals are granted funding on the basis of the following factors:

- Demonstrated needs of the applicant.
- Potential of the proposal for reducing child injuries and fatalities.
- Potential of the proposal for encouraging increased walking and bicycling among students.
- Identification of safety hazards.
- Identification of current and potential walking and bicycling routes to school.
- Consultation and support for projects by school-based associations, local traffic engineers, local elected officials, law enforcement agencies, school officials, and other relevant community stakeholders.

The SR2S grant funds can be used for the construction of the following work components:

- Pedestrian facilities, including new sidewalks, sidewalk widening, sidewalk gap closures, curbs, gutters, and curb ramps.
- Traffic calming, including bulb-outs, speed humps/tables, raised crosswalks, raised intersections, narrowed traffic lanes, lane reduction.
- Traffic control devices, including traffic signs, traffic stripes, in-roadway crosswalk lights, flashing beacons, pedestrian countdown signals, and vehicle-speed feedback signs.
- Bicycle facilities, including new or upgraded bikeways, trails, paths, and geometric improvements.
- Public outreach and education, including preparing and distributing safety awareness materials to school personnel, students, drivers, and neighboring home and/or business owners, and outreach efforts that promote walking and bicycling to and from school along the designated school routes.

These projects must be located in the vicinity of a school, which can either be an elementary school, middle school, or high school. The SR2S program requires a local matching fund of 10 percent from the applicant jurisdictions.

Federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program

In addition to the SR2S program, there is another outside source of funding for safe routes to school projects. Embarking on the success of the SR2S program and authorized by Section 1404 of SAFETEA-LU (the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users), the Federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program came into effect in August of 2005. Unless extended, it will expire in September 30, 2009. This Federal funding program emphasizes community collaboration in the development of projects, and projects that incorporate elements of the five E's – education, encouragement, engineering, enforcement, and evaluation.

The SRTS program has similar goals as the SR2S program and funds similar types of infrastructure projects. Two cycles of project solicitation for the SRTS program have been completed. However, no call for projects for the third cycle of the program has been received to date.

As differentiated from the SR2S program, the SRTS program funds projects within two miles of either an elementary school or middle school. Improvements intended for a high school are not eligible for SRTS funding. Also, the SRTS program does not require local matching fund from the applicant jurisdictions. All project costs are 100 percent reimbursable from the federal government.

Safe Routes to Encinal School Project

During the Fiscal Year 2007-08 project priority-setting process, the City Council approved a project to develop a Safe Routes to School plan for Encinal School.

Encinal School currently is a Grades Kindergarten, and 3–5 elementary school located in the Town of Atherton, near the intersection of Middlefield Road and Encinal Avenue. Encinal School is part of the Menlo Park City School District and serves students from Atherton, San Mateo County, and Menlo Park. Encinal School is planning to reconfigure the campus from K, 3-5 to a K-5 grade school and increase enrollment capacity to approximately 700 students by 2010.

The Encinal School vicinity area is bounded by Middlefield Road to the east, Laurel Street to the west, Linden Avenue to the south, and Watkins to the north and includes roadway segments that are owned and maintained by either Menlo Park or Atherton. There are also roadway segments in the vicinity area that are split along jurisdictional lines such as Encinal Avenue between Laurel Street and the westerly end of the school property.

At the City's Joint Transportation and Bicycle Commission meeting on November 16, 2005, the Encinal School area was identified as a location needing improvements to facilitate safe pedestrian and bicycle movements. The City received specific concerns from parents of students enrolled at this school about the lack of safe bicycling and walking routes, particularly on portions of Laurel Street and Middlefield Road. The City also received specific complaints about bicycle lanes getting blocked by parked cars on Laurel Street and drivers speeding on Encinal Avenue. In addition, a majority of the crosswalks of the streets surrounding the school are currently not easily accessible for pedestrians and not very apparent to drivers. Some sections of these streets have no or limited sidewalks and bikeways.

On January 15, 2008, the City Council authorized the City Manager to enter into an agreement with DKS & Associates to assist staff in developing a Safe Routes to School plan for Encinal School.

ANALYSIS

Public Outreach

A steering committee was formed to provide guidance to the consultant and ensure that the project goals and objectives were being met during the process of developing the plan. The steering committee was comprised of representatives from the City of Menlo Park including its Police Department, Town of Atherton, San Mateo County, Encinal School, Menlo Park City School District (MPSCD), Menlo Park Bicycle Commission, Menlo Park Transportation Commission, Menlo Park Fire Protection District, and surrounding neighborhoods. There were three steering committee meetings in addition to an on-campus tour with the steering committee and school district officials at Encinal School held during the early stages of the project.

There were three neighborhood meetings held for this project. There were morning and evening sessions for each neighborhood meeting to accommodate the parents of the Encinal School children as well as residents of the surrounding neighborhoods who could not attend the day meetings.

- April 10, 2008 (9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.; 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.)
- June 11, 2008 (10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.); June 12, 2008 (7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.)
- November 19, 2008 (8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.; 7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.)

At these neighborhood meetings, the neighborhoods were provided the opportunity to learn about the project and the project's goals and objectives, provide their comments, issues, concerns, and suggestions, evaluate the potential improvement alternatives, and ultimately, review and provide comments on the Safe Routes to School draft plan for Encinal School.

In addition to the neighborhood meetings, a parent survey entitled "Travel Characteristics for Encinal School" was made available on hard copy and electronic format via Survey Monkey to parents of the Encinal School students. The goals of this survey were to quantify the way school children travel to and from school and identify the factors that affect a parent's decision to allow their children to walk or bike to school. Eighty completed surveys were received.

Safe Routes to Encinal School Draft Plan

While considering the comments, issues, concerns, and suggestions received from the steering committee, parents of the Encinal School students, and residents from the surrounding neighborhoods during the public outreach process, the Safe Routes to Encinal School Plan was developed around the five E's for Safe Routes to School Plans: 1) Evaluation, 2) Education, 3) Encouragement, 4) Engineering, and 5) Enforcement, described as follows:

- Evaluation – Assessing the project needs through public outreach.
- Education – Teaching children and adults about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them to important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills, launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of the schools, and involving parents in safety programs.

- Encouragement – Using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling.
- Engineering – Creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and establish safer and fully accessible crossings, walkways, trails, and bikeways.
- Enforcement – Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure traffic laws are obeyed in the vicinity of schools.

For the engineering recommendations, the plan, in general, comprised of the following types of improvements. Refer to Attachment C, Conceptual Plan (Vicinity of School) and Attachment E, which shows proposed improvements in the school vicinity area as well as outside this area.

1. Intersection improvements – improvements proposed to enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility at intersections. These improvements would include the installation of concrete curbs at the intersections of Encinal Avenue with Laurel Street and Middlefield Road and at the intersections of Middlefield Road with Oak Grove Avenue and Santa Monica Avenue, and installation of pedestrian countdown signal at the mid-block crossing on Middlefield Road in front of Encinal School.
2. Bicycle facility improvements – improvements consisting of installing bicycle lane markings and widening of bicycle lanes. These improvements would include enhancing bicycle lane markings and striping on Encinal Avenue, Laurel Street, and Middlefield Road in the vicinity of Encinal School, installing “Sharrow” pavement markings in the Town of Atherton’s Lindenwood neighborhood streets, and widening of existing bicycle lanes on Middlefield Road between James Avenue and Willow Road to comply with the Caltrans standard for minimum bike lane width.
3. Pedestrian facility improvements – improvements proposed to improve pedestrian safety and emphasize the recommended path for crossings at intersections. These improvements would include the installation of high visibility crosswalks at crossings on Middlefield Road, Encinal Avenue, Felton Drive, Laurel Street, Glenwood Avenue, and Oak Grove Avenue, mostly in the vicinity of Encinal School.
4. Roadway facility improvements – improvements consisting of landscaping abatement, speed tables, school zone signage and curb inlet modifications. These improvements would include trimming vegetation and landscaping to clear bikeway and walkway facilities and bicycle-related signs on Encinal Avenue between El Camino Real and Middlefield Road, on Laurel Street between Glenwood Avenue and Encinal Avenue, and on Middlefield Road between Willow Road and Glenwood Avenue, installation of vehicle speed feedback signs on Middlefield Road and on Encinal Avenue, in the vicinity of Encinal School.

These improvements would also include installation of a speed table on Encinal Avenue between Laurel Street and Tudor Drive and a speed table on Encinal Avenue between Tudor Drive and Felton Drive. The implementation of these improvements, however, are contingent on a resident survey that would meet both the requirements of the City of Menlo Park’s Neighborhood Traffic Management Program and the Town of Atherton for installation of speed tables

on residential roadways. Staff is currently working on this resident survey for Menlo Park residents in the study area while Town of Atherton staff is working on a survey for its residents.

5. Other improvements – These improvements would include no stopping during school drop-off and pick-up times, on Felton Drive (both sides) between Encinal Avenue and Lennox Avenue and on Felton Drive (east side only) between Lennox Avenue and Arden Road.

Town of Atherton Requirements

As shown in the Safe Routes to Encinal School draft plan, there are improvements proposed on Town of Atherton roadways such as on Middlefield Road between Watkins Avenue and Ravenswood Avenue, on Oak Grove Avenue, east of Middlefield Road, and in the Lindenwood neighborhood streets. Since the beginning of the project, staff has worked with the Town of Atherton on the type of improvements that would be supported by the Town.

The Town of Atherton staff has indicated that it would present the draft Safe Routes to Encinal School to its Traffic Subcommittee on March 10, 2009 and potentially to their Town Council on March 18, 2009, regarding improvements proposed on Atherton roadways. Staff plans to incorporate any comments received from the Town of Atherton in the draft plan.

Menlo Park Bicycle Commission Meeting

On December 8, 2008, DKS & Associates and staff presented to the Bicycle Commission the Safe Routes to School draft plan that was presented at the third neighborhood meeting. At this meeting, the Bicycle Commission unanimously recommended to the City Council to approve the draft plan with the following amendments and comments:

1. Visual clarification of the location and direction of the existing crosswalks in the "Pedestrian Facility Improvement" plan.
2. Inclusion of the pedestrian overcrossing on Highway 101 in the Bicycle Facility Map for illustration; comments and concerns on the designation of a bike facility on El Camino Real, whether that is a viable option and how it would relate to the bicycle network; and verification of the designation of the Ringwood Avenue bike facility as a Class 2 bike lane since it was not signed as such for the entire corridor.
3. Inclusion of information on the number of students that lived within the one mile radius from the school and overlapping this information, for example, with the bike map to get a sense of potential school children biking to school.

Menlo Park Transportation Commission Meeting

On December 10, 2008, the Safe Routes to School draft plan was presented to the Transportation Commission. At this meeting, the Transportation Commission unanimously recommended to the City Council to approve the draft plan with the following amendments:

1. Clarification of the goals of the project.
2. Clarification of the project area diagram.
3. Clarification of the status of the proposed bike lane changes for this safe routes to school project relative to the proposed changes in the City's Master Bicycle Development plan.

Both of the Bicycle and Transportation Commission's comments listed above have been addressed and incorporated in the Safe Routes to Encinal School Draft Plan that is being recommended to the Council for approval.

California Safe Routes to School (SR2S) Grant Application

Staff proposes to apply for a joint SR2S grant with the Town of Atherton to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety at Encinal School. The project will consist of improvements on Encinal Avenue, Laurel Street, and Middlefield Road, as described in Attachment C, Conceptual Plan Vicinity of Encinal School. This is because, as indicated previously, the SR2S will only fund improvements in the vicinity of the school.

In the event that staff is successful in obtaining the State grant, staff will propose a project that would include the other proposed improvements outside the SR2S grant scope of work i.e. improvements outside the school vicinity. The call for projects under this Federal Program should occur within the next few months.

In the event that staff is unsuccessful in obtaining the State grant, staff will propose a project for the Federal program grant that would include all improvements proposed in the Encinal Safe Routes to School draft plan.

IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES

The total cost of the project proposed in the SR2S grant application is \$384,000. The local matching share is \$38,400 - 10 percent of the total cost. Currently, there is a budget for Fiscal Year 2008-09 in the amount of \$40,000 for the implementation of the Safe Routes to Encinal School Plan.

POLICY ISSUES

This project is consistent with several policies in the 1994 General Plan Circulation and Transportation Element. These policies seek to enhance the safety of school children who walk and bicycle to school.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed project is categorically exempt under Class 1 of the current California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines. Class 1 allows for minor alterations of existing facilities, including existing highways and streets, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle and pedestrian access, and similar facilities, as long as there is a negligible or no expansion of use.

Rene Baile
Transportation Engineer

Charles Taylor
Transportation Manager

PUBLIC NOTICE: Public Notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

- ATTACHMENTS:**
- A. [Resolution of the City Council of the City of Menlo Park Authorizing the City Manager to Submit a Joint Application with the Town of Atherton for a Safe Routes to School Grant for the Improvement of Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety for Safe Routes to Encinal School.](#)
 - B. [Safe Routes to Encinal School Draft Plan](#)
 - C. [Conceptual Plan \(Vicinity of School\)](#)
 - D. [Engineering Improvements](#)
 - E. [City of Menlo Park Bicycle Network](#)